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ABSTRACT

This publication includes two reports describing the development and beginning evaluations of two separate programs of the Baltimore (Maryland) School and Family Connections Project designed to increase parents' involvement in their children's learning in urban elementary schools. The first report, "Reactions of Parents and Teachers to Reading Activity Packets in the Primary Grades" (S. C. Herrick and J. L. Epstein), examines the reactions of 158 parents and 7 teachers to the Teachers Getting Involved with Families program at Elmer A. Henderson Elementary School (Maryland), which developed reading activity packets to help parents assist their children in reading at home. The second report, "Reactions of Parents to School Newsletters in the Elementary Grades" (S. C. Herrick and J. L. Epstein), examines the reactions of parents (70 families) to the I Care Parent Newsletter program at Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School (Maryland), which created and distributed newsletters to parents to make them feel welcome at school, inform them about the curriculum and their children's progress, and stimulate parents and children to read together. Both programs were viewed as successful in reaching parents and involving them more actively in their children's learning. Both programs are being revised and extended and will be evaluated in the future for their effects on student learning. Statistical data are provided in two tables. Two appendices to the first report contain the teacher interview form, the parents' survey, and responses. Four appendices to the second report contain the survey and parent responses. (SLD)

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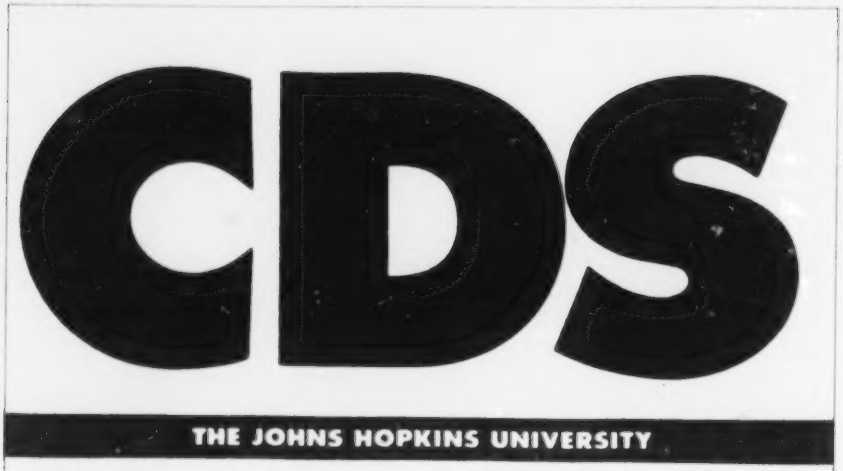

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

Improving School and Family Partnerships In Urban Elementary Schools: Reading Activity Packets and School Newsletters

Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein

Report No. 19

August 1991

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Improving School and Family Partnerships In Urban Elementary Schools: Reading Activity Packets and School Newsletters

Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein

Grant No. R117 R90002

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The Center

The mission of the Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students (CDS) is to significantly improve the education of disadvantaged students at each level of schooling through new knowledge and practices produced by thorough scientific study and evaluation. The Center conducts its research in four program areas: The Early and Elementary Education Program, The Middle Grades and High Schools Program, the Language Minority Program, and the School, Family, and Community Connections Program.

The Early and Elementary Education Program

This program is working to develop, evaluate, and disseminate instructional programs capable of bringing disadvantaged students to high levels of achievement, particularly in the fundamental areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. The goal is to expand the range of effective alternatives which schools may use under Chapter 1 and other compensatory education funding and to study issues of direct relevance to federal, state, and local policy on education of disadvantaged students.

The Middle Grades and High Schools Program

This program is conducting research syntheses, survey analyses, and field studies in middle and high schools. The three types of projects move from basic research to useful practice. Syntheses compile and analyze existing knowledge about effective education of disadvantaged students. Survey analyses identify and describe current programs, practices, and trends in middle and high schools, and allow studies of their effects. Field studies are conducted in collaboration with school staffs to develop and evaluate effective programs and practices.

The Language Minority Program

This program represents a collaborative effort. The University of California at Santa Barbara is focusing on the education of Mexican-American students in California and Texas; studies of dropout among children of recent immigrants are being conducted in San Diego and Miami by Johns Hopkins, and evaluations of learning strategies in schools serving Navajo, Cherokee, and Lumbee Indians are being conducted by the University of Northern Arizona. The goal of the program is to identify, develop, and evaluate effective programs for disadvantaged Hispanic, American Indian, Southeast Asian, and other language minority children.

The School, Family, and Community Connections Program

This program is focusing on the key connections between schools and families and between schools and communities to build better educational programs for disadvantaged children and youth. Initial work is seeking to provide a research base concerning the most effective ways for schools to interact with and assist parents of disadvantaged students and interact with the community to produce effective community involvement.

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Abstract

This publication includes two reports. They describe the development and beginning evaluations of two separate programs of the Baltimore School and Family Connections Project designed to increase parent involvement in their children's learning in urban elementary schools. The first report examines the reactions of parents and teachers to the Teachers Getting Involved with Families program at Elmer A. Henderson Elementary School, which developed reading activity packets to help parents assist their children in reading at home. The second report examines the reactions of parents to the I Care Parent Newsletter program at Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School, which created and distributed newsletters to parents to make them feel welcome at the school, inform them about the curriculum and their children's progress, and stimulate parents and children to read together. Appendices to each report contain the survey and interview materials used with parents and teachers to elicit their reactions. Both programs were viewed as successful in reaching parents and involving them more actively in their children's learning. Both programs are being revised and extended in response to their evaluations and both will also be evaluated in the future for their effects on student learning.

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Reactions of Parents and Teachers to Reading Activity Packets in the Primary Grades

Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein

Introduction

The Teachers Getting Involved with Families (TGIF) project at Elmer Henderson Elementary School has several goals: 1) to increase family-school contact; 2) to increase parents' knowledge of the school's expectations and curriculum; and 3) to develop and provide information on how parents can help their children's learning at home. One program designed to help meet these goals is Reading Activity Packets. This report describes the packets, parents' reactions to them, teachers' reactions, and the implications of these responses for the further development of the program.

The TGIF Team of teachers and the Parent Liaison met at the end of the school year in 1989 to plan and to create **Reading Activity Packets** for the first and second grades. The team met again in September with volunteer parents to assemble the packets for distribution to students in the new school year. The first grade packet contained 21 activities and the second grade packet contained 36 activities that teachers believed would help students practice important skills. The first grade packet focused on consonants and the second grade packet focused on vowels and reading comprehension. Both packets included exercises in following directions.

Each packet contained a cover letter signed by the first and second grade teachers asking parents to assist their children on the skills assigned, to sign their children's work, and to help their children remember to bring the packets back to school. The letter also stated that the homework would be graded.

Parents were first alerted to the Reading Activity Packet project in September on Back To School Night. At that meeting, the teachers explained that the packets would be sent home as part of their children's regular homework assignments. Parents were reminded again in November during Family Night to continue working with their children on the packets.

Teachers varied in the way they used the packets. First grade teachers instructed their students to work with their parents on the activities at home. Second grade teachers assigned more work in the packets as part of their in-class activities. One second grade teacher assigned the bulk of the activities to be completed over the Christmas vacation for students to review skills during the holiday. Each teacher developed her own system of rewards and grading.

How effective are Reading Activity Packets? In the initial implementation of this project, it was not possible to conduct pre-tests, post-tests, or group comparisons to determine if the packets had an effect on student achievement. It was possible, however, to learn how well the project was implemented, whether the packets were received and used, how parents and teachers reacted to the packets, and how the packets might be improved for future use.

The Parent Survey and Teacher Interview

The TGIF Project Director and the Parent Liaison of Elmer Henderson Elementary School met with staff from The Johns Hopkins University and the Fund for Educational Excellence to plan an evaluation of the implementation of Reading Activity Packets. A short survey for parents and an interview with teachers were designed to obtain responses to the packets.

Parent Survey

The Parent Survey consisted of 14 questions that obtained 32 items of information about parents' opinions, experiences, and comments about the reading packets. Parents were asked to indicate if they wanted more information about specific subjects (e.g., arithmetic, language arts, reading, spelling, handwriting, testing skills) in order to help their children reach academic goals, or if they had other questions about Elmer Henderson. In order to obtain a profile of the parents who participated, the respondents also were asked to identify their relationship to their child (e.g., mother, father, grandmother), their employment, and whether they had time to help their children at home. Parents also provided information about their children's success in and attitudes toward school and their reactions to the packets.

Teacher Interview

The group interview consisted of eight questions that obtained information on first and second grade teachers' uses of and reactions to the Reading Activity Packets and how the packets could be improved in the future. Teachers were asked to describe how they used the packets, what instructions they gave their students, how many activities they assigned, how many activities the students completed, how they graded the work, to what extent

they thought the parents were involved, how the packets might be improved for future use, and how to improve parents' involvement in their children's education. The interview protocol appears in Appendix A.

Survey and Interview Results

This section summarizes the survey results from 158 parents and the main points that emerged from the interview with seven teachers and the parent liaison. The reactions to the Reading Activity Packets may be useful to Elmer Henderson's TGIF Team and other teachers in planning future home learning activities and other programs to involve parents. Results of the Parent Survey appear in Appendix B.

The Participants

About 72% of the parents of first graders (92 out of 128) and 57% of the parents of second graders (66 out of 115) returned a completed survey, for a total of 65% of the families responding.

About 36% of the parents who returned the survey work full-time outside the home; 13% work part-time; and 51% do not have a job outside the home. The work pattern of these parents was similar to those of an earlier school-wide survey which found that about 54% worked full or part-time. Not surprisingly, 91% of the respondents were mothers; 3.2% were fathers; 3.2% were grandmothers; 1.3% were aunts; and 1.3% were fathers and mothers responding together.

Parents' ratings of the academic standing of their children ranged from top to average to poor students. Of the parents who responded, 8% rated their children as top students; 40% said their children are good students; 26% reported their children are average; 21% rated their children as fair; and 4% said their children are poor students. There were no significant differences between first and second graders' parents' ratings of their children's success in school. These ratings were about the same as an earlier survey of parents at this school, suggesting that this survey provides a good representation of the range of students' abilities in the primary grades.

The majority of parents reported that it is "very true" (61%) or "true" (32%) that their children like school. Parents of first graders were somewhat more likely than parents of second graders to say it was "very true" that their children like school (67% versus 51%). About 88% of all parents said their children in both grades like to read. As expected, parents who reported their children were good students also were more likely to report that their children like school and like to read.

The Reading Activity Packets

Parents were asked whether their children brought home the packet, how many activities their children completed and with whom, whether their children remembered to take the packet back and forth to school, and what the parents thought about the packets.

The TGIF Team's goal was to reach all families of first and second graders. Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of all the parents responding reported that their children brought home the reading activity packets; 18% reported their children did not bring them home; and 5% were not sure. Not counting those who weren't sure, more first graders' parents (90%) saw the packets than did parents of second graders (70%).

The TGIF Team's goal was for all students to complete all the activities in the packets. Parents were asked how many activities they did with their children. Of those who said their children brought the packets home and reported a specific number of activities completed, most parents said they worked with their children on at least one or two of the exercises. There were significant differences between the first and second grades.

Table 1 shows that 82% of the first grade parents compared to 62% of the second grade parents reported they worked on three or more activities with their children. A greater proportion of second graders' parents did none of the activities with their children. This was due in part to the fact that fewer parents of second graders saw the packets and because second grade teachers used the packets more for classwork.

One of the goals of the Reading Activity Packets project was to increase parent involvement in their children's homework. When asked with whom their children *mostly* worked when at home, most parents (60%) reported that they and their children worked together on the activities. This included 69% of the first grade parents and 54% of the second grade parents. About 20% of the parents said that their children worked on the activities mostly by themselves; and another 17% reported that their children worked mostly with another adult, with brothers and sisters, or with other family members.

Parents who reported that they work full-time tended to work on more activities with their children than

TABLE 1

Parents' Reports of Number of Activities Completed With Their Children (%)

Number of activities done	Grade Level First n = 61	Second n = 34
None	1.6%	14.7%
1 to 2	16.4%	23.5%
3 to 4	23.0%	8.8%
5 to 6	21.3%	14.7%
7 or more	37.7%	38 2%

Includes *only* those parents who responded "yes" to question 1, "Did your child bring home the booklet, 'My Reading Activity Packet'?" and who reported a specific number of activities completed.

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parents who work part-time or who do not work outside the home. Fifty per cent (50%) of those who work full-time completed seven or more activities. Parents who do not work outside the home were more mixed in their involvement. Many (41%) worked on three to six activities; equal proportions (each 29%) completed many (seven or more) or very few (two or fewer) activities with their children. These results suggest that mothers' work outside the home is not the main determinant of parents' involvement in home learning activities.

Students who worked with a parent (mainly their mothers) at home completed more activities than those who worked alone. About half the children (53%) who worked alone completed three or more activities compared to 83% of the children who worked with a parent.

In general, parents of more successful students tend to do more activities with their children. However, this pattern is less dramatic in the first grade than in the second. In the first grade, when students start out more equal and perhaps more eager, parents of poor, fair, and average students tend to complete almost as many activities with their children as parents of good students. In second grade, parents of average and less successful students do significantly fewer activities with their children. This suggests that teachers must give particularly clear guidance to parents of less successful students and to the students themselves about how to work together on home activities.

How Clear was the Purpose? The TGIF Team explained the purpose of the packets at Back To School Night, reinforced their message later during Family Night, and included a short letter in the packets. Not all parents attended these events at school and not all parents understood the letter included with the packet. About 42% of the parents said that they "needed more help from the school to know what to do with the packets." Parents who needed help worked on fewer activities with their children.

Even though a considerable number of parents would have liked more help, just about all parents were overwhelmingly in agreement (94%) that the activities helped their children practice reading skills, with 43% agreeing "a lot." The same high percentage agreed that "The packets showed me what my child is learning in school." Thus, the packets served as a useful contact with parents and gave them information about their children's reading curriculum.

Parents who wrote comments* indicated that they understood the purpose of the packets. For example:

> The activities will help my child improve, in the areas he need his/her most help in.
>
> It gives the children a good idea about what is expected of them in the first grade.
>
> I think the Reading Activities Packets really benefits the children learning ability, to read, listen to sounds, and learn them.
>
> I think that the activity packet really does help my child when he is at home.

What did Parents Think of the Purpose? Most parents were enthusiastic about the Reading Activity Packets. About 58% agreed strongly that the packets were a good idea, with only about 2% disagreeing at all. There were some interesting patterns in the parents' responses:

- Parents who felt the packets were easy to read were more positive about the packets.
- Parents who reported that their children like school a lot were more likely than other parents to report that the activities informed them about what their children are learning.

Of the parents responding, 32% wrote extra comments and suggestions about the Reading Activity Packets. Most of the comments showed the parents' enthusiasm and beliefs about the likely benefits of the packets to their children's reading, homework habits, and general development:

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* All comments throughout this report are in the parents' own words..

It was very fun to do with my child. It helped her excel a lot mentally.

It's good for my child because she has a reading problem.

... good idea ... something for them to study while ... home.

I feel the Reading packet was excellent for reinforcing [my child's] reading skills.

I think the reading activities are a very good project for the children. Keep up the good work.

About 94% of the parents said the school should send home the packets at least once or twice a week, with 35% suggesting every day, and another 26% suggesting many times a week. Some parents suggested that it would be good to expand the scope of the packets to include more activities, more subjects, and all the grades. These suggestions included:

Yes I did enjoy working with my son on the activity Packet however I think that the packet should also contain a section for vowels. (A first grade parent.)

They should be able to bring the packet home over the weekends. So they can have other practices also.

I believe more homework should be given.

It should also be given to assist other kids at a higher grade level (2-5 grades).

This kind of packet should be made every school year for grade levels 1-5, because they are very helpful.

In general, the parents agreed that the packets were easy to read, but 18% reported that the print was not clear. One parent wrote, "Many of the pages were not printed clearly." Another said, "Please have the print clear to understand." Parents who said they had less time to help their children at night were less forgiving of poor printing. When time is at a premium, clearly printed materials with clear instructions are particularly important.

Overall, the concept of a home reading activity packet for reviewing skills was appreciated by parents. The TGIF Team and other teachers will want to consider the parents' reactions.

Parents' and Teachers' Reports of Students' Reactions to the Packets. Most parents thought that the activities were fun for their children, with 43% agreeing strongly, and 53% agreeing. On another question, 14% reported that the activities were boring for their child.

The parents' reports about their children's reactions to the packets varied by grade level, ability, and attitudes toward school. According to their parents:

- First graders and students who like school, and especially those who like to read, were more likely to have found the activities interesting and fun.

- Children who were better students found the activities more interesting and completed more of them, whereas less successful students completed fewer activities and needed more help in using the packets.

- Parents who thought their children found the activities boring also said they needed more help in using the packets.

According to teachers, most of the children liked the packets. One first grade class cajoled a substitute teacher to let them complete some of the exercises in class and had a great time telling their regular teacher about this upon her return.

What the Teachers Had to Say About the Packets. Teachers reported that they liked the packets and that they thought the parents and students liked them as well. One teacher noted of her students, "When they bring them in the morning they are really excited about them."

Teachers thought the packets were useful for reinforcing skills taught in class, providing additional exercises that parents could do with their children, communicating the curriculum to parents, and teaching children the responsibility of taking care of their workbooks and keeping track of assignments. One second grade teacher remarked: "I got my best homework grades from that book! I wish I had another for the next report card!"

Teachers agreed that the packets were useful in meeting the challenge of increasing parent involvement. One teacher summarized her reactions by saying that sometimes it is hard to get parents to sign homework, let alone become actively involved. But, the packets helped the teachers "stress that this is a good time to understand how working with their child can help the children and help themselves to understand what's going on in school." Another teacher added:

A lot of parents don't know what ... to do [to help on] a particular skill that you send home for a home assignment so [the packet was] an aid. [A parent might say to her/his

child:] "We can do this. This is just like the [other] skills you just had for your home assignment."

Packets increased the dialogue between parents and teachers. Two teachers reported that the exercises gave parents a way to identify which skills were problems for their children. Some parents who didn't understand how they should use the packets asked the teachers. One teacher explained that some parents who brought their children to school took that opportunity to ask their children's teachers about a particular skill that was in the packet. Another teacher stated: "...I could explain it to them and they could see exactly what to do ... at home."

In addition, the packets served as a record of the skills and the level of mastery the students had attained. One teacher evaluated the packets as "...a good experience for [the students] to have a workbook [and to be] proud of the work that they had done in the book."

In summary, according to parents and teachers the packets had several advantages. They:

- reinforced the skills already taught in class;
- provided parents with guidance in how to help their children at home;
- gave parents an understanding of the curriculum and teachers' expectations;
- helped parents to identify particular skills their children need to practice;
- created "a partnership" between parents and teachers, and helped students understand that teachers want their parents to be involved in schoolwork at home;
- increased students' responsibility for their homework by requiring them to remember to bring packets back and forth to school.

Overall, the packets increased the involvement of many parents who otherwise would not have been involved with their children's schoolwork.

Family-School Connections

Although the main goal of the Reading Activity Packets is to help students practice skills, a second goal is to help parents become more informed and involved in their children's education. Some of the survey questions asked about other practices of parent involvement and whether the school could provide more and better information to parents.

Increasing Information on How to Help at Home. Most parents agreed that they have time each evening (93%) and on weekends (95%) to help their children, with a majority saying this was "very true." Parents can be a helpful resource to teachers who are willing to take some time to involve them in activities that are important for students' success in school.

Regardless of their children's grade level, student attitudes, or school success, or the parents' outside work commitments, nearly all parents (96%) reported that they want more information about how to help their children this year in one or more subjects. Two parents commented:

> I think this is a good way for me to help my child at home. I would like to help in any way.
>
> Could you please give or make my child another packet so I can help her learn more?

The largest number of parents want more information about reading (81%); followed closely by those who want to know how to help in spelling (73%), handwriting (62%), arithmetic (60%), test taking skills (49%), and language arts (39%). The following patterns emerged:

- Parents of less successful students and those who do not like to read tended to want more information about reading and spelling. Conversely, parents who say their children like reading ask for more information on other subjects.
- Parents of second graders wanted more information about language arts and test taking skills -- especially for their girls.

The Reading Activity Packets may be viewed as one part of an ongoing information system that parents would like the school to provide.

Teachers' Uses of the Packets Affected Parent Involvement. Most first grade teachers stressed the use of the packets as an interactive tool between students and their parents. Some second grade teachers tended to stress the packets as supplementary to work done in class. The different instructions described by the teachers undoubtedly influenced how students and parents used the packets:

One teacher reported:

> I told my children the regular homework that they must do. "Do what you can *on your own*. Ask for assistance *only* if you are running into problems. If you don't understand, *then* ask your parents.

Another teacher stated:

> ...I wanted to use it as a vehicle to get the parents to sit down with the children, because many of them don't sit down with them to go through their notebooks or to go over papers and so forth, so I wanted ... them to do it together.

A third teacher explained:

> ...I would say, "Let's do the next one tonight for homework," and then write "homework" at the top [of the page] and then stamp the date on it. And then they'd know which homework assignment they had for that night and then would bring them right back.

Because students are a very important link in family-school connections, their participation must be encouraged. The packets were checked or rewarded but not graded separately from students' other work. Teachers attempted several ways to motivate their students to complete the reading activities and bring the packets back and forth to school.

One teacher used pencils as a tangible reward for completed packets; another used zeroes when packets were not returned. In one case, a parent brought the child's packet to school the next day, so that her child would not get a zero. Another teacher rewarded her students with "smiley faces" when their work was correct and "sad faces" when it was incorrect. This teacher reported that most of her children were successful and were proud to receive smiley faces on their work. One teacher mentioned that a classroom chart of students and numbers of activities completed might be effective. All teachers agreed that the students needed "some type of incentive" to increase the completion of homework and to remember the packets each day.

The teachers also made a successful effort to promote parents' interest directly. After hearing about the packets from the teachers, many parents looked forward to receiving them. One teacher related:

> ...We informed the parents about the packets. They knew they were coming ... I didn't send it home the first day and a parent came up [and said:] "What happened to my packet? [My child's] lost the packet." I said "Well, I haven't sent them home yet." But they were expecting it. You see, many times they don't expect anything from the school.... This was like a partnership. They knew I was expecting them ... to do something with ... their child, and they were looking forward to this, most of them....

Although parents want to be involved, and some try to be involved, many students believe that their teachers do not expect parents to be involved. The Reading Activity Packets allowed teachers to tell the students that teachers wanted them to talk to their parents about schoolwork. For example, one teacher told her students: "...this would be a good time for you to teach your parents what we're doing in class." The young first and second graders were very receptive to this role reversal with their parents and laughed with satisfaction at the prospect.

Teachers indicated that when they stressed parent involvement, children found their parents' help a source of pride. For example:

> ...many of them were *proud*..."My mommy helped me to do this...." Or one child said [about] a pasting activity, "I don't have any paste." I said, "But you do have flour and water." [The youngster came back to report:] "So my mommy made flour and water and we pasted the pictures down!"

Teachers could take greater advantage of parents' interest and willingness to help if they *inform parents* that they are expected to talk about homework with their children, *design homework* that requires student-parent interaction, and *inform students* when and how to interact with parents on homework. The results from Elmer Henderson indicate that when teachers make it very clear that they want parents and students to work together, many parents become involved and interested in more information.

Increasing School Communication with Parents. Parents were asked whether they had other questions about Elmer Henderson's program. About a fifth (19%) of the parents offered comments or asked questions. Several made general comments about how pleased they were with the school and the teachers. Others asked about summer programs and school trips, the curriculum and the administration, parent involvement, school uniforms, and extra-curricular activities. Examples of the parents' concerns are:

> I want to [know] that this is a school that read.

> When is they ever going to have computers.

What are the future plans for students to excel on the computers.

Are they going to go on school trips.

I would like to know are they going to have a summer program.

Why can't they bring home their Reading books those children need to read them at home.

Can [my child] get more help in reading [this] year.

Does Elmer Henderson have a future goal to eliminate the large classrooms or to give the teachers an aide to help them full-time.

I would like to know about the new principal, [and] tutoring programs if any.

How often are teachers evaluated.

When they have school plays and if they have any extra [curricular] activities.

I would like to know more about the activity going on at the Elmer Henderson #101.

Will the TGIF program continue at #101? Will [it] be mandatory to wear uniforms this year?

Needs some more good teachers for guidance.

Why is it a problem that the parents can not stand inside the building on cold days, or rainy days.

The questions and comments from parents revealed that they are very interested in their children's programs and progress and rely on the school to help them know how their children are doing. Earlier surveys of teachers and parents indicate that when teachers involve parents in their children's learning at home, parents have a greater appreciation for what teachers are trying to accomplish. For example, one parent wrote: "The teachers are more concerned this year and a lot helpful."

The TGIF team, other teachers, and administrators may want to address a few questions at a time in a regular communication each month. If a newsletter, taped messages, or other communications are used to answer questions, parents of students at all grade levels could be encouraged to write, call in, or ask teachers questions as they occur throughout the year.

Recommendations: Ideas to Improve Home Learning Techniques

Although most parents saw the packets come home, a good number (over 20%) did not. Of those who saw the packets, most did at least a few of the activities with their children, but a good number (over 25%) did none or were not sure. Even if parents and students worked together on some activities, a good number of the students (about 20%) worked mostly alone. Thus, although the Reading Activity Packets made an impressive start, there is still room for improvement to reach more parents and students.

This section summarizes recommendations from parents and teachers on how to improve the Reading Activity Packets. Many of the recommendations reflect the difficulties that are to be expected when starting a new program like this. Several problems were identified: 1) not all parents were aware that the packets were distributed; 2) not all parents knew what to do with the packets; 3) some students had problems bringing the packets back and forth; 4) not all teachers had developed successful reward systems for encouraging students to complete homework; and 5) some of the activities were printed poorly.

How Can Parent Involvement Be Increased?

To encourage more interaction between students and parents, future packets could include clearer instructions to parents and students about how to conduct and discuss the activities, and specifically designed activities that require interaction between students and their parents and that can be completed *only* by their working together.

Clearer Instructions. Teachers pointed out that fewer parents of second graders came to Back to School Night and so did not hear directly about the purpose and importance of the packets. The teachers also observed that the better students were more likely to interact with parents and complete their packets than the less successful students. All agreed that communication with hard-to-reach parents needed to be improved, including parents of less successful students and parents who do not read well themselves.

A number of solutions might be considered. The Parent Liaison suggested that a large, clear notice might be published in the monthly newsletter to let

more parents who don't come to meetings know about the packets.

Another solution teachers considered was the use of video-taped vignettes or dramas that show parents how to help their children with homework. Parents could view the tape during a Family Night, a PTA meeting, or any time in the media center, or might be able to borrow the tape to view at home.

One teacher suggested calling parents to explain positive ways to help their children to do their work. She was worried that some parents are punitive rather than encouraging because they do not know what else to do.

Helping parents and students learn to use the packets might help alleviate the frustration some parents feel and provide a model on which to base interaction on schoolwork in later years. A friendly follow-up by teachers or by the Parent Liaison after the first week or two that the packet is distributed might help those parents who are still unsure about how to work with their children in helpful ways.

Activities That Require Interaction. The Reading Activity Packets could contain activities to practice important skills with parents (as they do now) and other homework activities that require interaction, such as the child reading a short poem aloud, or playing a reading game, or the child reading aloud a sentence he/she has written. Teachers also could design activities to encourage reading as a part of daily life. Family, community, and cultural activities such as shopping, cooking, making things at home, cleaning up, looking at street posters and advertisements, participating in baseball games, and other experiences could be encouraged to reinforce reading (and other subjects) in ways that link school skills to family life during the time parents and children spend together.

How Can the Program Be Improved and Expanded?

Printing And Assembling Packets. Teachers agreed that parents like to see homework that has been printed (rather than dittoed). This requires advanced planning. The teachers felt that the packets were not burdensome to create, because the packets were so useful and because many teachers shared the work and had help from five parents in collating and stapling them. This cooperation will be needed to ensure continued success of the program.

Grading And Rewarding Activities. Teachers agreed that all students and their families need incentives to work together on activities at home. Some reward systems may be more effective than others. Next year, the TGIF Team and other teachers may want to give some attention to the different methods they use to grade and reward students' work to learn which are more motivating and effective with students and parents.

More Skills. The teachers agreed that the packets could cover other important skills, including handwriting or a section which children could read to their parents. One teacher reflected that activities should involve real parent-child exchanges and interactions. Some activities could be directed by the parents and others by the students.

Smaller Packets For A Few Skills At A Time. Teachers agreed that adding more skills would make the packets unwieldy and difficult to collate. One solution would be to create separate packets for each skill, or short-term homework packets for a unit of work.

Teachers felt that preserving the packet concept was especially important for first and second graders. Teachers felt the younger children enjoyed having special workbooks and that parents liked them. However, a different approach might be used with older children, such as single activity sheets that are distributed as homework and collected individually, as in the Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork (TIPS) process.

Smaller packets or single activity sheets might provide quick and clear rewards for work completed. Elmer Henderson's TGIF Team and other teachers may want to consider which activities should be placed in a packet and which activities might be occasional and separate interactive assignments.

More Subjects. Teachers were in accord with parents' requests that packets be developed for other subjects. Parents especially asked for more information on how to help their children with spelling, arithmetic, test taking skills, and handwriting in addition to reading and language arts. Each subject might eventually have its own Activity Packet for parents and students to work on together as the child progresses through the grades.

More Frequent Assignments. Another way to expand the program is to assign activities more frequently, as requested by most parents. One teacher, in agreement, stated: " We could have used a whole lot more pages."

More Grades. One goal for next year might be to involve the third grade teachers in developing packets or other forms of homework assignments to guide students' and parents' interactions on interesting learning activities that are important to school success. Fourth and fifth grade teachers may be included in subsequent years, until teachers from all grades have made home learning activities part of the educational culture of Elmer Henderson.

The survey of parents and the interview with teachers suggest that expanding the program is likely to be well received. Parents want more assistance in how to help at home in more subjects and across grade levels. As their children advance from one grade to the next, parents of first and second graders will be more receptive to the continued use of the packets or other interactive homework because they will have already experienced their benefits.

Better Program Planning. The Elmer Henderson TGIF Team and other teachers may want to establish a schedule for planning and creating home learning activities for the school year. A plan of goals, specific activities, and the responsibilities shared by teachers, the Parent Liaison, parents, and children could be outlined to:

1) Decide which subjects and which skills will be included in packets or in single assignment activities. (Responsibility: All teachers.)

2) Design and collect activities for the next home learning packets or other ways to involve parents. (Responsibility: All teachers of grades and subjects selected for the packets.)

3) Organize a team of teachers for *each* grade with team leaders who are responsible for coordinating the activities, distributing the packets, and assisting other teachers.

4) Review the collected activities and select the best ones for students' different needs and levels of learning. Teachers could work together to develop sets of individual activities in many subjects. Teachers could then select the ones they want to use and when they want to use them. (Responsibility: The TGIF Team and other interested teachers.)

5) Discuss alternative ways to introduce the packets to students and their parents. (Responsibility: All teachers of *each* grade using the packets, Parent Liaison, Principal).

6) Discuss other questions, issues, and tasks that teachers, the parent liaison, and parents identify for improving the packets and other school and family partnerships.

Evaluations Of The Effects On Student Learning. One question that could not be answered at Elmer Henderson was whether and how the Reading Activity Packets helped students academically. Did students improve in specific skills as a result of the exercises that they completed?

The TGIF Team and other teachers may want to consider giving a "pre-test" in September to determine students' starting points on these skills, or use an early reading skills checklist to identify the skills that most students need to practice. Then a follow-up "post-test" could be given after the completion of each packet to determine if students who completed the packets (or particular skills in the packets) maintained or sharpened their skills more than other students.

Short assessments of this type -- a preliminary measure and later measure of students' skills -- should help the Elmer Henderson TGIF Team and teachers determine how well the reading packets achieve the program's goals of helping students maintain and improve skills.

Conclusions

There were three main goals for the Reading Activity Packets: to increase contact between the families and the school, to increase parents' knowledge of the curriculum and of the school's expectations for their children, and to provide information on how parents can help their children at home.

These goals were met in the first implementation of the Reading Activity Packets. Parents were appreciative of the reading packets, supported their continued use, and agreed overwhelmingly that the packets informed them about what their children were learning in school. Most parents worked with their children, particularly parents of first graders, due in part to the way teachers used the packets. More parents were involved than would typically be the case without the packets or teachers' directions and encouragement.

In general, the parents felt that their children found the activities to be fun and challenging. One of the reasons for the overall success of the packets was that the activities were tailor-made to the curricula of the two grades and to the students' capabilities and interests. If similar packets are designed for the third and upper grades, the need for a clear focus, brevity, and parent-child interaction should guide the development of activities. Exercises could be designed that *require* the active involvement of students and parents. As with any pioneering program, it will take some work over time to design and select such activities.

A more specific evaluation will be needed to show whether work on the activities helps students maintain or improve skills. This includes questions of whether less successful students, average, and above average students make progress because of the extra practice and encouragement they receive from their parents at home. This type of assessment could be considered if learning packets are used next year.

The survey results provide good information to Elmer Henderson's teachers and administrators about parents' interests in helping their children reach achievement goals. Most parents want more communication with Elmer Henderson to keep informed of their children's academic skills and progress and about other aspects of the school program.

Overall, the Reading Activity Packets were a good beginning. Involving parents in learning activities at home is known to be the hardest type of involvement to implement and the type that parents want most of all. It is, therefore, worth working to improve and extend home learning activities that will help youngsters do better in school.

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol

1. **What did you hope the packets would help you do?**

   . Did they work for you? How?

   . Did they help you do what you wanted? Why? or Why not?

2. **What did you tell the students about the packets?**

   . How did you explain to your students what you wanted them to do with the packets?

   What did you say?

3. **How many activities did you assign for homework?**

   . How often during each week?

   . More than once a week? TALLY:_____

   . How many of you used more than half the packet?

   TALLY: 1st grade: _____

   2nd grade: _____

   . Did the students do what you assigned?

   . How many of you graded the work in the packets?

   TALLY:_____

   . Did the grades count toward something?

   -- the report card grade? 1st:_____ 2nd:_____

   -- a reward of some kind? 1st:_____ 2nd:_____

   . Do you think the students enjoyed the packets?

   -- What did the students tell you?

4. **What evidence do you have that the parents worked with their children on a regular basis?**

   . Can parents be helpful to their children in reading?

   . Which parents of your students are hardest to reach?

   . Do you think the parents liked the packets?

   . What did the students say about the help at home?

   . How many of you would say **most** of your students' parents helped?

   1st grade: _____

   2nd grade: _____

   TALLY: _____

5. **There's always room for improvement --**

   . What problems did you have using the packets?

   . Did the students remember to take the packets home and bring them back to school?

   . Were the packets much more work for you? TALLY: Yes:___
   No:___

   . What extra work did the packets require?

6. **Let's talk about the packets themselves.**

   . What ideas do you have to improve the packets?

   . Are the packets the best way to go or could you involve parents with a homework sheet once a week?

   . Are there other ways for parents to stay informed and involved with their children's home practice in reading?

7. **Are there any other issues you would like to discuss about the packets or the parents' involvement?**

8. **Are there any particular questions or types of information you would like to see in the report?**

   For example, one question is *which students* are more likely to do their school work -- those whose parents help them or those who work by themselves? (What other questions...?)

Appendix B: Results of Elmer Henderson Parents' Survey

Total N= 158	**First Grade**	**n=92**	**71.9%**
	Second Grade	**n=66**	**41.8%**

1. Did your child bring home the booklet, "MY READING ACTIVITY PACKET?"

17.6% No----›Please skip to **QUESTION 6**
77.8% Yes
4.6% Not sure

2. Please tell us your opinions about the Reading Activity Packet.

	WHAT DO YOU THINK?				
	DISAGREE A LOT	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**AGREE A LOT**	**N***
The Reading Activity Packet is a good idea.	DISAGREE	Disagree 1.7%	Agree 41.7%	AGREE 56.7%	120
My child and I needed more help from the school to know what to do with the packet.	DISAGREE 27.1%	Disagree 30.5%	Agree 28.8%	AGREE 13.6%	118
The activities helped my child practice reading skills.	DISAGREE .8%	Disagree 4.9%	Agree 51.2%	AGREE 43.1%	123
The print was clear and easy to read.	DISAGREE 2.5%	Disagree 15.0%	Agree 47.5%	AGREE 35.0%	120
The activities were boring for my child.	DISAGREE 44.3%	Disagree 41.7%	Agree 12.2%	AGREE 1.7%	115
The activities helped me know what my child is learning in school.	DISAGREE 2.5%	Disagree 3.4%	Agree 52.9%	AGREE 41.2%	119
The activities were fun for my child.	DISAGREE 2.5%	Disagree 2.5%	Agree 52.1%	AGREE 42.9%	119

3. About how many activities did you do at home with your child? (n=128)

Not Sure	None	1-2	3-4	5-6	7 or more
18.8%	7.0%	16.4%	13.3%	15.6%	28.9%

4. At home, my child MOSTLY worked on the activities in the packet... (n=126)

alone.	with me.	alone & with me.	with another adult.	with brother/sister.	with family.	Did not work on them.
19.0%	59.5%	2.4%	4.0%	9.5%	3.2%	2.4%

5. My child remembered to take the packet back and forth to school. (n= 128)

Every day	Most days	Some days	Never
42.2%	17.2%	30.5%	10.2%

6. The school should send home reading activities...(n=149)

Every Day	Many Times a Week	Once or Twice a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Never	Other
34.2%	25.5%	33.6%	6.0%	0%	0.7%

* N= Number of parents responding when fewer than 158.

7. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the Reading Activity Packet?

No Comment:	68.2%	Negative:	12%	Content:Good Idea	58%
One Comment:	21.7%	Neutral:	16%	Beneficial for Skills	6%
Two or More Comments:	10.2%	Positive:	68%	Want more Activities	16%
	n=157	Both:	4%	Need Improvement	12%
			n=50	Include other Grades	8%
					n=50

8. How true are these statements for you and your child?	VERY FALSE	Mostly False	Mostly True	VERY TRUE	N
I have time to help my first grader each night.	FALSE .7%	False 6.0%	True 39.3%	TRUE 54.0%	150
I have time to help my first grader on weekends.	FALSE 2.7%	False 2.0%	True 34.0%	TRUE 61.2%	147
My first grader likes to read	FALSE .7%	False 11.7%	True 44.1%	TRUE 43.4%	145
My first grader likes school.	FALSE 2.1%	False 4.8%	True 32.4%	TRUE 60.7%	145

9. What subjects do you want more information about to help your child this year? (n=152)

80.9% Reading
73.0% Spelling
61.8% Handwriting
59.9% Arithmetic
48.7% Test Skills
38.8% Language Arts
4.6% Other (Art, Speech, Behavior)

10. So far this year, my first grader's... work is...(n=154)

8.4% Excellent
40.3% Good
26.0% Average
21.4% Fair
3.9% Poor

11. What else do you want to know about Elmer Henderson this year?

No Request:	80.9%	Content: General:	33.3%	Problems/Criticism:	6.1%
One Request:	15.3%	Administration/Teachers:	18.2%	School Trips:	3.0%
Two or more Requests:	3.8%	Curriculum:	18.2%	Extra-curricular:	3.0%
	n=157	Summer Programs:	9.1%	School uniforms:	3.0%
			n=33		

12. My first grader is...

47.1% Male
52.9% Female
n=155

13. Do you work outside the home?

35.9% Full-time job
13.4% Part-time job
50.7% Work at home
n=142

14. What is your relation to the child?

90.9% Mother
3.2% Father
3.2% Grandmother
1.3% Mother & Father
1.3% Aunt
n=154

Sample Questionnaire **Teachers** **Reading**
T. G. I. F **Getting Involved** **Activities**
with Families **Packet**

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Please take a few minutes to give us your ideas about the Reading Activity Packet that your child in FIRST GRADE brought home. We will use your ideas to plan future projects.

Your child should return this sheet to school on the NEXT SCHOOL DAY. Thank you very much!

Your Child's Teacher and the
The T.G.I.F. Team

---

1. Did your child bring home the booklet, "MY READING ACTIVITY PACKET?"

(CHECK ONE)

_____ No---->Please skip to **QUESTION 6**

_____ Yes

_____ Not sure

2. Please tell us your opinions about the Reading Activity Packet.
(Circle ONE CHOICE on each line.)

	WHAT DO YOU THINK?			
	DISAGREE A LOT	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**AGREE A LOT**
The Reading Activity Packet is a good idea.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
My child and I needed more help from the school to know what to do with the packet.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
The activities helped my child practice reading skills.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
The print was clear and easy to read.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
The activities were boring for my child.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
The activities helped me know what my child is learning in school.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE
The activities were fun for my child.	DISAGREE	Disagree	Agree	AGREE

3. About how many activities did you do at home with your child? (Circle one)

Not Sure None 1-2 3-4 5-6 7 or more

4. At home, my child MOSTLY worked on the activities in the packet... (Circle one)

alone. with me. with another adult. with brother/sister. Did not work on them.

5. My child remembered to take the packet back and forth to school. (Circle one)

Every day Most days Some days Never

>>>OVER<<<

6. **The school should send home reading activities...**(Circle one)

Every Day	Many Times a Week	Once or Twice a Week	Once or Twice a Month	Never	Other_____ (please specify)

7. **Do you have any comments or suggestions about the Reading Activity Packet?**

_____

_____

8. **How true are these statements for you and your child?** (Circle one choice on each line.)	**VERY FALSE**	**Mostly False**	**Mostly True**	**VERY TRUE**
I have time to help my first grader each night.	FALSE	False	True	TRUE
I have time to help my first grader on weekends.	FALSE	False	True	TRUE
My first grader likes to read	FALSE	False	True	TRUE
My first grader likes school.	FALSE	False	True	TRUE

9. **What subjects do you want more information about to help your child this year?** (Check all that apply...)

____ Arithmetic
____ Language Arts
____ Reading
____ Spelling
____ Handwriting
____ Test Skills
____ Other (Please specify)_____

10. **So far this year, my first grader's work is...**(Check one.)

____ Excellent
____ Good
____ Average
____ Fair
____ Poor

11. **What else do you want to know about The School this year?**

_____

_____

12. **My first grader is...**

_____ Male
_____ Female

13. **Do you work outside the home?**

_____ Full-time job
_____ Part-time job
_____ Work at home

14. **What is your relation to the child?**

_____ Mother
_____ Father
_____ Grandmother
_____ Other (please specify)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH ! !
Please ask your child to RETURN this sheet to the Teacher on the NEXT SCHOOL DAY.

Reactions of Parents to School Newsletters in the Elementary Grades

Susan C. Herrick and Joyce L. Epstein

Introduction

The I Care Parent Newsletter is one of Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School's programs designed to increase parent involvement. The Newsletter has been developed and is issued by the I Care Team at the school, which consists of a number of teachers seeking to increase parent involvement. In the 1989-1990 school year, the goals of the Newsletter were to make parents feel welcome at the school and inform them about the curriculum and their children's progress. The Team also hoped the Newsletter would stimulate parents and children to read to one another.

The Team evaluated the I Care Parent Newsletter with brief questionnaires at the end of each issue and mid-year, and with a more comprehensive random telephone survey of all families at the end of the year. The telephone survey was designed to reach parents who might not ordinarily return questionnaires or communicate with the school. This report summarizes the results of the informal and formal evaluations of the Newsletter and the implications of the results for continuing and improving the program.

The Project Director organized a team of teachers and students to solicit, collect, edit and collate articles, and to publish and distribute each issue of the Newsletter. The first Newsletter of the year (the September/October issue) began with a note of welcome by the I Care Team leader. The second (November/December) and third (January/February) Newsletters began with news briefs from the I Care Parent Club in order to convey to parents that their involvement is important and welcome at the school. Two additional issues were published in March and May, but were not used in the analyses for this report. The bimonthly Newsletter included articles about and by the students, such as student progress and achievement, classroom activities and school programs, as well as social and cultural articles for parents, such as holiday recipes.

Informal Evaluations

This section summarizes the results of four short evaluations of the I Care Parent Newsletter that were conducted by the I Care Team during the 1989-1990 school year. In three issues, the evaluation forms appeared as the last page of each issue of the Newsletter. (See Appendix A.) This was a good way to obtain comments and reactions because a parent could easily fill in the blanks and tear off the page to return to the school, while keeping the rest of the Newsletter intact.

The September and November, 1989, and February, 1990 Newsletters invited parents to indicate their own and their children's favorite articles and to give other written comments. These informal responses were returned to the teachers by the children. A schoolwide Mid-Year Survey consisting of seven questions was used to discover whether parents were aware of the Newsletters, whether they read them, and whether they found them informative. On these evaluations, parents signed their names and gave their children's names and classes. The forms were returned to the teachers by the children. (See Appendix B.)

Results of the Informal Evaluations. Because the Mid-Year Survey was based on voluntary returns, not all grades were equally represented, nor were parents who were not aware of the Newsletter. Questionnaires were returned by 72 parents, about 12% of the school population. This sample is not representative of the school as a whole, however; some parents who do not receive notices from their children or who do not read well do not return questionnaires. The largest proportion of respondents were parents of first graders (29.2%). Between 10% and 20% of parents of students in other grades responded. Thirteen parents (18%) did not receive the bimonthly Newsletter, but only a few of these parents were unaware of its existence. A few parents who reported not receiving them said that they had read them, making the interpretation of such results ambiguous.

Parents were asked to identify the articles which they and their children most enjoyed. According to the I Care Parent Club tallies, parents reported that their children's favorite articles were those written by students or those that recognized students' achievements. These included students' "Letters to Santa" and "Student of the Month" (named for good grades and school citizenship). Parents favored articles that provided ways to improve their children's academic skills, such as "First Grade Tips on Homework" (featuring first grade students' ideas on making sure homework is completed) and the "Black History Match" (in which the names of outstanding African Americans were to be matched with statements about their accomplishments). Parents also enjoyed their children's "Letters to Santa" and "Recipes."

Results from the Mid-Year Survey confirmed these favorites and showed additional family preferences

for "Slide on to School" (about an ice cream party as a reward for perfect attendance), "Story Related Writing" (in which students wrote continuations of stories they read in class), the "Honor Roll," and teachers' "Perfect Attendance."

On the evaluation forms and Mid-Year Survey, some parents explained the reasons for their choices. The following reasons were given, respectively, by parents of children in grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.*

> I loved and liked all of them, each part of it touch my heart.
>
> She enjoyed seeing her name on the Honor Roll.
>
> I like it all because it gives me an idea of what's going on in #250 and if I can help I will.
>
> The section with the scheduling of events is really informative. Helps to keep me abreast of what's going on.
>
> I enjoyed all of them.... [My child enjoyed] "Three Billy Goats Gruff."
>
> "Honor Roll" -- It's so wonderful to see so many kids make this special achievement.
>
> A number of parents stated with clear enthusiasm that seeing the names of students who had achieved in some outstanding way was a source of inspiration.

For example, one parent wrote:

> [My first grader] really enjoyed "Student of the Month" because it featured someone she knows and respects.... She intends on being featured as 'Student of the Month' with hard work and ambition.

About 18% of the parents responding to the Mid-Year Survey filled in the section called "Suggestions" with ideas or general reactions. Some suggestions were particularly useful:

> The feature 'Student of the Month' [should be done] within every grade -- It gives incentive to the students within each level-- incentive to work harder in order to be featured.
>
> Allow students and parents to submit short, original poems.

A mother of 3 children suggested the inclusion of "Articles to help parents to get into outside activities -- going to schools, jobs, volunteering ... [and] ... articles about dealing with stress which comes from being a single parent."

Finally, parents took the opportunity to praise the Newsletter staff for their efforts: "Keep up the good information," wrote one parent. "Keep the newsletters coming," wrote another. In general, the evaluations returned to the I Care Team were very positive and encouraging.

The Formal Telephone Survey

Although some parents take an opportunity to express their ideas on written questionnaires, most parents do not. Parents may need more personal contacts to share their reactions. A telephone survey requires person-to-person interaction and allows the interviewer to rephrase questions in order to clarify meanings and to motivate the person being interviewed to respond and to feel comfortable about making comments or asking questions. In addition, parents may answer questions they would leave blank on a written questionnaire if they are not good writers, or because of time constraints.

The I Care Project Director and the Parent Liaison of Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School met with staff from The Johns Hopkins University and the Fund for Educational Excellence to plan a formal evaluation of the I Care Parent Newsletter. A short telephone survey was designed to obtain responses to the Newsletter from a representative sample of parents.

Interviews were conducted from May 8th to May 23rd 1990. Calls were made between 9 AM and 8 PM (unless parents requested later callbacks). The average length of an interview was 14 minutes, and interviews ranged from 6 minutes to 28 minutes.

From a school roster of 595 students, 100 households were initially selected at random with replacement for unusable numbers.

Many of the telephone numbers in the original list had been disconnected, changed to non-published numbers, were numbers of businesses that could not identify a parent with a child at the school, or were

* All comments throughout this report are in the parents' own words.

numbers of households having no association whatsoever with the school. Very few parents (under 5) refused to participate for various reasons not ascertained. Two weeks of intense telephoning produced 70 interviews, covering an estimated 12% of the school population.

In order to obtain the sample of 70 families, 217 telephone numbers were tried. About 44% of the sample was reached on the first try; 39% required 2 or 3 calls; and 17% required 4 to 9 tries. Despite these difficulties, the sample obtained was generally representative of the families of the student population. Families varied in their education and neighborhoods, and the interviews included parents who would not typically participate in written surveys or evaluations.

The Parent Telephone Survey consisted of 29 questions that obtained 124 items of information on parents' opinions, experiences, and comments about the Newsletter and other sources of information about the school. The respondents also identified their relationship to their children, their employment and other training, and provided information about their children's success in and attitudes toward school. Appendix C contains a copy of the survey that includes directions followed by interviewers to elicit responses and to probe for further information.

Results of the Parent Telephone Survey

The main purpose of the Parent Telephone Survey was to evaluate the I Care Parent Newsletter. However, the principal also issues a School Newsletter. Therefore, it was important to identify and distinguish between the two. Parents were asked, "Are you aware that Bernard Harris has *two* newsletters?" For further clarification, parents were asked if they knew about the "short, one- or two-page school newsletter," as well as the "thicker booklet called the 'I Care Parent Newsletter' from the teachers." About 7% of the families interviewed were not aware of either newsletter; 9% were aware only of the School Newsletter; 33% were aware of only the I Care Parent Newsletter, and 51% were aware of both.

Overall, of the parents who were aware of the School Newsletter, 10% said it is excellent; most (59%) said that it is very good; and 32% said it is just ok. Nearly all agreed the School Newsletter is easy to read (95%) and informative (79%) or somewhat informative (19%).

The rest of the questions in the telephone survey focused on the I Care Parent Newsletter. The parents' reactions may be useful to Bernard Harris' I Care Team and other teachers in their plans for future Newsletter and other programs to involve parents. Results of the Parent Telephone Survey appear in Appendix D.

Parent Profile

The interviewer asked to speak with the person most knowledgeable about the school. Not surprisingly, 77% of the respondents were mothers; 10% were grandmothers; 7% were fathers; 4% were aunts; and one person (1%) was an uncle.

In their education, forty-six per cent (46%) of the parents completed high school; 24% had some college; and one mother had a master's degree. Although 29% of the sample did not complete high school, nearly a third (31%) of this group and about 50% of the sample overall had additional education or training, as in the form of the G.E.D., Manpower Corps, computer or secretarial training, or military service.

Half (50%) of the parents interviewed worked full-time outside the home; 14% worked part-time; and 36% did not work outside the home.

Student Profile

The 70 families had a total of 112 children enrolled at Bernard Harris. Most (57%) of the families had one child enrolled at the time of the interview; 29% had two children enrolled; 11% three children; 3%, four children.

The children were represented in all grades: 7% were in pre-K; 21% in kindergarten; 20% in first grade; 14% in second grade; 14% in third grade; 13% in fourth grade; 9% in fifth grade and 1% (one child) in special education.

Parents who had more than one child enrolled at Bernard Harris were asked to answer questions in terms of the child in the highest grade. There was a fairly even distribution from first to fifth grade with 10 to 12 (14% to 17%) of these children representing each grade.

Parents' ratings of the academic standing of their children ranged from top to average to poor. Of the parents interviewed, 20% rated their children as top students; 34% as good students; 24% as average; 19% as fair; and 3% as poor students.

Asked how their children liked school, about 60% of the parents reported that "this year" their children

like school a lot; 24% said some; 16% said a little; and none reported that their children do not like school at all.

The questions about parents' and children's backgrounds were asked to determine if family characteristics influenced parents' use of or reactions to the Newsletter.

The I Care Parent Newsletter

The I Care Team's goal was to reach all families. Eighty-four per cent (84%) of all families received at least one copy of the Newsletter. About 17% did not receive any issues of the Newsletter; 9% of the families received only one; 27% received two; 19% received three; 17% received four; 11% received five or more, and 1% (one parent) did not know. Some parents explained that because they had more than one child at Bernard Harris, they received duplicates. One parent had four children enrolled at the school and said she had received "about twenty!"

Of the 59 parents who received the newsletter, most (71%) reported they read all or most of the I Care Parent Newsletters. In slightly more than half these families (53%), other family members also read the I Care Parent Newsletter. While fathers (7%), grandmothers (12%), aunts (7%), and uncles (4%) were mentioned in several instances, the largest number of readers, in addition to mothers and students at Bernard Harris, were siblings (32%).

One goal of the I Care Team was to increase reading among the Bernard Harris families by encouraging parents to read articles in the Newsletters to their children and for children to read to their parents. Parents were asked "How often have you read something aloud to your child in the I Care Parent Newsletter?" Forty-four per cent (44%) said "most times" or "always"; 41% chose "once in a while"; and 15% reported "never."

In answer to the question, "How often has your child read aloud something to you from the I Care Parent Newsletter?," 36% reported "most times" or "always"; 29% said "once in a while"; 36% reported "never." The results revealed the following trends:

- In general, the higher the students' grade level, the more likely the child reads to a parent from the Newsletter.
- Students who do better in school are more likely to read to their parents.
- Better educated parents are more likely to read to their children, however, parents' level of education does not determine whether their children read to then
- Parents of children who like school are more likely to read to each other.
- If someone reads aloud to the child, the child also is more likely to read aloud.
- Parents and students are more apt to read to each other from the Newsletter if the child's name or grade level is mentioned.

Parents were more likely to read the Newsletter if they received more issues, read a familiar name in the newsletter, or had children with higher scholastic standing. Sixty-nine per cent (69%) of the parents read about someone they knew in the Newsletters. Thirty-three per cent (33%) reported their child's name appeared in the Newsletter; 47% reported their child's teacher's name was mentioned; 28% said their child's grade level or class was represented.

Newsletters Are Well Received. Overall, of the 59 families who received it, 22% rated the I Care Parent Newsletter as "excellent"; 49% reported it was "pretty enjoyable"; 27% said it was "just ok"; and 2% (one person) said it was "boring." Most parents said the Newsletter is "just right" in length while 18% said it was too long. Nearly all (90%) said it is easy to read.

Parents said they liked to read about the events and activities going on at the school and about students' progress and achievements such as "Student of the Month" and "Perfect Attendance." Corroborating results from the I Care Team's short surveys, 17% specifically mentioned that they enjoyed reading articles written by or about the students. Most of the comments revealed parents' enthusiasm for the Newsletter:

> The activities that feature the kids. To see that they're busy .... It shows the kids are interested in things that have "meat" to it -- some substance.
>
> I like the articles that help the parents help their child. Recipes (Snacks), Student of the Month. It's kind of inspiring. I can say to my children, "Well, you see you can do that too!"
>
> Student/teacher of the month, children's poems -- lets me know [about] some of the things at school -- [I] like it a lot.

Newsletters Are Informative. Parents were asked if they knew about nine programs that were featured in the three issues of the I Care Parent Newsletter. The question was phrased in general terms and not linked to the newsletter in order to determine whether parents who had received the I Care

Parent Newsletter were better informed than those who had not.

Parents who received more issues of the I Care Parent Newsletter knew about many more of the school programs than parents who did not receive them, particularly the Parent Club, the Reading Clubs, the Apple Computer Drive, and volunteering. Parents who received both the I Care Parent Newsletter and the School Newsletter were more aware than other parents about these programs. But receiving both newsletters did not improve their knowledge about Rewards for Perfect Attendance, the Honor Roll, or the Dial-A-Teacher programs.

In general, at least 65% of all parents interviewed were informed about all of the programs, except for a program called the City-County Connection. It is interesting that 9 of the 10 persons (14% of all parents) who were aware of this program were all recipients of the I Care Parent Newsletter!

Newsletters Could Be Improved. Of the parents interviewed, 29% made comments and suggestions about the I Care Parent Newsletter. The comments addressed improving the visual characteristics of the newsletter such as the graphics, size of the print, and length. One grandmother explained: "The print could be bigger for people who [find it] hard to see." Parents who felt the Newsletter was easy to read were more positive in their evaluations of the Newsletter.

Parents also suggested ways to improve the content, adjust the timing of the delivery to provide advance notice of events, and increase children's input:

> I would add children's comments -- what they think about school.
>
> Add a little more from the students. I like reading about the children because it helps me. Their progress is interesting.
>
> More articles written by children, ... upper grades and honor roll students [could] participate in planning [the] newsletter.
>
> It could be longer .... [For example,] more articles for parents to help the children read, how to encourage pre-K to learn their numbers,...ways to encourage the children to want to learn, to stay in school. I have 6 children so I need all the help I can get. I can't get to the school so the newsletter is very important.
>
> More in-depth information on different classes, like what activities the students actually do in their classroom on daily basis.
>
> I think they should put more of what's going on like a schedule or calendar so I would plan better. I want to know if it's worth my while to take off from work. I need as much information as possible so I can decide about whether I need to go.
>
> The newsletter overemphasizes parents coming *to* the school during times that are not convenient. Less emphasis should be given on being *in* the school....

Comments of Non-Recipients. Of the eleven parents who had never seen an I Care Newsletter, nine offered suggestions about what an ideal newsletter should include. Many of these were requests for information about school programs, class projects, extra-curricular activities, and how to help their children do better in school. Said one, "I don't want to beg for information." A grandmother explained that she wanted to know "how the children are improving. Are they learning? Are they getting proper care? What are their activities?"

Parents whose children have problems at school and who did not receive the Newsletters made several suggestions. One parent wanted the newsletter to include information on "times for parent-teacher conferences; on what's going on." This parent also suggested that the school "have an answering machine, because when parents get off work, it is too late to call the school. Letters should be mailed." Another parent remarked that the Newsletter should be mailed because she wants to be involved but her child doesn't bring the Newsletters home.

Other Family-School Connections

Another goal of the I Care Parent Newsletter is to help parents become more informed and involved in their children's education. Some of the survey questions asked about whether the school could provide more and better information to parents.

Overall School-Family Communication. Most (86%) of the parents said they felt the school provided some or a lot of information about what's going on at the school. About 60% said they obtained this information through dittos, teachers' notes, reading their children's notebooks and/or visiting the school, and 20% reported they received phone calls. Fewer than half of the parents (45%) said that their children gave them information, but some parents may have taken it for granted that their children give them information, and so did not mention this. Indeed, these percentages are only gross indicators of parents' major lines of communication with the school.

Fourth- and fifth-grade girls were more likely to inform their parents of what's going on at school than other students. However, 27% of the parents said

they did not feel informed about their children's progress *in their classes*. The school and teachers are doing well in communicating information about the school, but there is room for improvement, particularly in providing details about classroom learning, work, and progress.

Some parents complained they did not receive information in time to plan for their children's involvement in activities -- especially those events which required a fee. Two parents explained:

> If they give us a calendar in advance that you could hang up and check, that would help a lot .... I need more advanced notice when a child has a holiday. If I don't get the message, the children might be sent home early or not go to school and then my child is home alone. Yes, sometimes they wait too late before they tell you that they'll have a holiday. [Also] if they tell you on Friday that the child needs $30 for pictures on Monday .... That only gives you a weekend to get up the money.

> I need information about graduation. They've got a bad habit of sending letters on the same day. They've not sent out letters about graduation and I don't know when money is needed. We don't get paid at the end of the month. They don't give you sufficient time to save and have money ready for events, trips, school expenses. We need two weeks [advance notice] at least.

Other parents explained that they needed information about their children's academic performance more frequently in order to help their children improve and experience success. Two parents commented:

> I learn about my child's progress only if I go up there. If my son has done something [wrong], then I get a call. My work schedule interferes with them. I can only come when classes have already started .... When my child is failing, I hear about it at report card time. I need to know *before*. Then I can help my child. If she's not working hard, I ought to know. They don't send a "deficiency note" or a warning [in time] ... and it's too late.

> Why is the office not as helpful as they should be? They should be more friendly [to the parents]. [We get] a lot of "I don't know" answers from the office.

Good information and good results seem to go together. For example, parents who said they were well informed about school and their children's classes were more likely to have received more I Care Parent Newsletters. Parents also were more likely to receive information from children who were good students and/or liked school.

The results suggest that in families where children and parents talk together about school, parents are likely to be more aware of what goes on at school. When children are doing well, they may be more likely to discuss their school progress with their parents. A constellation of interactions -- talking together about school, reading newsletters, reading aloud -- combine to keep parents informed about their children's classwork and involvements at school. We cannot untangle the "causes" of these patterns with our survey data, but it is quite likely that they promote one another.

Increasing Information on How to Help at Home. At least 80% of all parents interviewed said they wanted more information about how to help their children at home with reading, math, spelling, and test taking skills. About 70% said they wanted more information about language arts, writing, and science. Table 1 compares 1990 results with parents' responses to a similar question asked of parents in this school in 1987. There is a substantial increase in the parents' requests for more information on how to help their children at home. This may mean that more parents need more information than before, that more parents know they *should* ask for information, and/or that the school has succeeded in encouraging parents to express their wishes to be informed and involved.

Table 1
% of Parents Wanting Information About School Subjects

	1987 Survey	1990 Survey
Math	62%	80%
Reading	65%	8[illegible]%
Spelling	55%	80%
Science	25%	71%
Handwriting	51%	71%
Current Events	23%	---
Social Studies	---	67%
Language Arts	---	70%
Testing Skills	---	84%
Other	---	30%

Thirty per cent (30%) of the parents mentioned they wanted information about additional subjects, including Black history, art, music, drama, foreign languages, computers, and family issues.

Art activities -- that helps them. [This parent indicated that art teaches children to be more observant and to put their ideas into pictures even when words might fail them.]

Drama ... they don't do plays like they used to.

Black history should be integrated into [the curriculum] all year long -- not just in February. Children should be in touch with their ethnicity.

Family issues -- to help kids understand what family unity is.

The questions and comments from parents revealed that they are very interested in their children's programs and progress and rely on the school to help them know how their children are doing.

Other Questions and Comments. Although the primary purpose of the telephone survey was to obtain parents' reactions to the I Care Parent Newsletter, many respondents took the opportunity to give feedback -- via the interviewers -- to the school and to express their ideas about school programs. They expressed gratitude that the school was interested in what *they* had to say. The parents' comments indicate a real desire to communicate with Bernard Harris, to obtain information, and to give feedback. About 41% of the parents offered comments or asked questions. The following examples of parents' comments show that they are pleased; at the same time, they are concerned and want more information about summer programs, school trips, the curriculum, the administration, parent involvement, school security, and extra-curricular activities.

I like the school and I like the principal. They've worked with my girls. I was worried that the school would be closed. The teachers are caring about the students. I don't have no problem with the school.

I have 5 grandchildren who have gone to Bernard Harris. They loved it. I think it's a good school. The teachers were very kind. I love Bernard Harris.

How does Bernard Harris compare to other elementary schools? How do the teachers compare? The school has done a pretty good job in correcting the bad attitudes of some kids - those that fight and are afraid of each other. Maybe [the school could] bring parents together to talk about it.

The school [should be] more challenging. My oldest daughter is bored. In all her classes she gets straight Es. Her friends at other schools get foreign languages, fundamentals in algebra to keep up with the very competitive, fast moving world preparing them for high school and college, and representing themselves -- and prepare them *early* at a young age.

I'm glad they improved. The new parent liaison and new vice-principal have helped. Security -- I was upset because someone walked in and asked for my daughter and she didn't know them. People can walk past the office without anyone's knowledge. They need a buzzer system. They have to lock the door!

They didn't have a crossing guard. Two months ago we got a crossing guard .... We're delighted that we have a crossing guard now. This principal is straightforward and she means what she says and the children know it. This principal is a nice lady and the school got better since she got there.

I'd like to get more involved even though I can't come to the school.

Would like some information on the Volunteers in School Program.

I would like to know about programs during the summer -- even for kids that are excelling. I want to know if they have all day Pre-K programs for 4 and a-half-year olds. Are there exceptions to December 31st deadline so the child doesn't waste a year?

I'm going to try to make this their last year. They haven't tested them. I've been working hard with them. The school hasn't helped me. My children need the reading program. You can't pass a child just because he smiles nice. The work has to be there too. You can't pass a child without his making the grade.

Are they planning to get a gym? I think they need more athletic equipment like softball and basketball equipment.

[I am] very concerned about Bernard Harris not being very good. [At another school, my daughter] learned a little Spanish. They pushed them harder.

Do they have tutoring in math? They should have some kind of counseling [to help them identify] what they're

emotionally feeling, like group guidance counseling each week. They should have a counselor who will ask 'em what they like and give 'em greater interest in school to build their self-esteem and help them plan their futures like what they want to *be* when they get older and what kinds of training they'll need to get there.

I know the teachers can't do it all by themselves. The parents have to help too. I don't like that the children can't talk in the cafeteria. They should be able to talk to each other at least after lunch because that's the only time they have in school to express themselves.

The questions, comments, and concerns from this representative sample of families reveal that many parents are interested in their children and the school. They want more information to help them help their children do better as students. Parents' questions could be addressed as a regular feature in the I Care Newsletter -- e.g., Questions and Answers. Or, other systems could be designed.

Summary and Recommendations

Over 80% of a representative sample of parents at Bernard Harris were aware of and received the I Care Parent Newsletter. These parents generally gave the Newsletter high marks as a good source of communication from the school. This is a good start in the first full year of the Newsletter.

There is, of course, always room for improvement. Less than half the parents read to their children on a regular basis and only about a third of their children (mostly in the first, second, and third grades) read to their parents regularly from the Newsletter. The I Care Team, other teachers, administrators, and parents may consider parents' reactions and the suggestions from this report to improve and expand the program.

More Student Input

When student names appear in newsletters, students and parents are more likely to read them and to read them aloud to each other. The I Care Parent Newsletter includes many examples of this. Parents would like their children to have even more opportunities to contribute their own work in the forms of articles, essays, poems, recipes, and letters-to-the-editor. With greater participation, readership can be strengthened.

More About Students' Achievements

A few parents suggested that each grade should be featured in each issue of the newsletter. Some possibilities might include "Student of the Month" for each grade. In addition, because girls tend to be more academically oriented in these early years of their education, it might be helpful to include "Boy Student of the Month" and "Girl Student of the Month" for each grade. The "Student of the Month" need not feature only academic progress or excellence, but citizenship, attendance, and other student talents and accomplishments.

Information About Classes

Parents expressed a desire for more information about what their children are learning in their classes. Features that highlight teachers' goals and class projects would be welcome to parents.

Timing of Publication

The Bernard Harris I Care Team and other teachers may want to establish a schedule for planning, creating, and distributing newsletters every two months throughout the year so that special events are featured well in advance. Many parents expressed the need for a calendar of events in order to better prepare for their children's involvement in school activities and their children's participation in special events -- especially those that require even a small amount of money.

Or, the I Care Team may want to consider publishing a school calendar separately from the Newsletters and include the expected Newsletter publication dates so parents will look forward to receiving Newsletters at a scheduled time. Or, the Principal's School Newsletter -- which does not focus on student work but presents schoolwide information -- might offer the general information that parents need, including calendars.

Two-Way Communications

One way to improve school-to-home communications is to create opportunities for home-to-school communication. Parents of students at all grade levels could be encouraged to write, call in, or ask teachers questions throughout the year. Space for questions might be included in each newsletter on

the last page along with short evaluations for easy tear-off and return. The I Care Team, other teachers, and administrators may then address a few questions in each Newsletter. A person with the specific role to coordinate these communications might see to it that the questions are channelled to the persons who can best answer them in subsequent issues of the Newsletter.

Use of the Telephone Survey

There are benefits that come from talking with families, even if not all are easily located. A telephone interview can include a more representative sample of parents who would not usually respond to a written questionnaire. Parents who cannot read or cannot read well may feel freer to speak their minds.

A combination of written and telephone survey salso may be used to advantage.

This survey provides information about the level of investment needed if a school wants to reach a representative sample of families by phone. Many of the problems with the telephone survey noted in this study -- e.g., many phone numbers change during the school year -- can be alleviated somewhat with attention to the quality of the school's telephone lists. Typically, the telephone numbers of students' families are not very accurate by the end of the school year. This means that procedures are needed to check and update the lists during the year, perhaps each time report cards are sent home. If phone lists were accurate, random sample telephone surveys could be accomplished more smoothly and in a more reasonable amount of time.

Conclusion

The goals for the I Care Parent Newsletter were well met in the 1989-1990 school year. The informal evaluations of the Newsletter and the random telephone survey show that parents at Bernard Harris appreciate the Newsletters, support their continued use, and agree overwhelmingly that the Newsletters informed them about school programs.

Taken together, the informal and formal evaluations of the I Care Parent Newsletter provide good information to Bernard Harris' teachers and administrators about parents' interests in helping their children reach achievement goals. Most parents want more communication with Bernard Harris to keep informed and to ask questions about their children's academic skills and progress and about other aspects of the school program. An effective newsletter is an important component of a strong program of school and family connections.

Appendix A. Informal Evaluation Form (Tear-Off Sheet) at the End of Each I Care Parent Newsletter

Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School #250
1400 North Caroline Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21213

_____,1990

Evaluation Form

I received a copy of the "I Care Newsletter." I read it and shared at least two articles with my child. The article I enjoyed most was _____. The article my child enjoyed most was _____.

_____
Signature

.....

Appendix B. Informal Mid-Year Survey About the I Care Parent Newsletter

Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School #250
1400 North Caroline Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21213

I Care Parent Newsletter Mid-Year Survey

1. Are you aware that Dr. Bernard Harris has a Parent Newsletter?
   yes no

2. Have you received the bimonthly Parent Newsletter?
   yes no

3. Did you read the newsletter?
   yes no

4. Did you read the newsletter with your child?
   yes no

5. Name one article that you especially enjoyed.

   _____

   _____

6. Name an article that was your child's favorite.

   _____

7. Did the newsletter help to keep you informed about what's happening at School #250?
   yes no

Suggestions: _____

Parent's Name _____

Student's Name _____

Grade/Section _____

Appendix C. TELEPHONE SURVEY OF NEWSLETTER IMPLEMENTATION EFFECTIVENESS
at Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School #250
(N. Caroline Street)

FACE SHEET

TELEPHONE
NUMBER_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CASE #: _____

Write in TIME:____AM____PM

DATE: _____

INTERVIEWER: _____

For Coder

FINAL DISPOSITION:		
Length of Interview		

Complete.....1

No Locate.....2

Not Available.....3

Not Eligible.....4

Other.....5

SEND COMPLETE REPORT TO:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Call and Callback Schedule:

Date	Time of Day	Length of Interview (min)	Name of Interviewer	Spoke to (relation to child):	Callback Date & Time or Comments:

Hello, my name is _____.

I am calling for the Parent Survey of Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School.

Is this _____ _____ (telephone number)?

NO ====> Sorry, I must have the wrong number. Good bye.

YES ====> (CONTINUE)

I would like to speak to the parent or guardian of a child who attends Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School.

Do you have a child who attends Bernard Harris?

YES======>

Are you the parent or guardian?

PROBES: What is your relation to the child(ren) who go(es) to Bernard Harris Elementary School?

YES ==>(CIRCLE ANSWER) (WRITE IN)

MOTHER	GRANDMOTHER	AUNT	OTHER_____
FATHER	GRANDFATHER	UNCLE	OTHER_____

IF NOT THE PARENT/GUARDIAN, ASK:

Are you the one at home who has the most contact this year with Dr. Bernard Harris Elementary School?

YES===>(GO TO TOP OF NEXT PAGE)==========>

NO====>

NO====> Sorry to have disturbed you. I must have the wrong number. Good Bye.

CODER

May I speak with the adult who has the most contact with the school and who knows the most about it?

YES

NO===> CONSULT "REFUSAL SHEET"

IF NOT HOME, ASK:==>Should I ask for the child's mother when I call again? When is the best time to call in the next day or two?

[INTERVIEWER: WRITE NEW DATE & TIME ON CALLBACK SCHEDULE]

ASK NEW PERSON:

Do you have a child who attends Dr. Bernard Harris Sr. Elementary School?

YES===>(GO TO TOP OF NEXT PAGE)==========>

NO===> Sorry, I must have the wrong number. Thank you for your time. Good bye.

IF NOT NOW ===>Sorry to have called at a bad time. When would be a good time to call back in the next day or two?

[INTERVIEWER: WRITE NEW DATE & TIME ON CALLBACK SCHEDULE]

You may have received a letter from the principal, Mrs. Brown at Bernard Harris saying that someone may call you. Did you receive that letter?

IF LETTER NOT RECEIVED, SAY: I am sorry it did not reach you. The letter was to let you know that someone representing the school would be calling you. (CONTINUE)

The teachers would like your ideas to plan and improve school projects and this will only take about 10 minutes. May I ask you a few questions about some of the activities at Bernard Harris?

NO===> [INTERVIEWER: CONSULT "REFUSAL SHEET" AND TRY TO OBTAIN A CALLBACK DATE & TIME. INDICATE ON CALLBACK SCHEDULE ON FACE SHEET.]

YES===> That's great. Thank you for participating.

Let me begin by asking you...

1. How many of your children attend Bernard Harris this year?

1 2 3 4 5 or more

☐☐

(CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY)

2. What grades are they in at Bernard Harris right now?

2A. Is this a boy or a girl? (CIRCLE grade and B or G)

(WRITE IN)

Pre-K	K	1	2	3	4	5	Other_____
B / G	B / G	B / G	B / G	B / G	B / G	B / G	B / G

☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

3. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about Bernard Harris.
Are you aware that Bernard Harris puts out two newsletters?

NO -------›PROBES: Am I correct--You have not seen <u>any</u> newsletter from the school?
Not the one-page sheet from the Principal?
Not the thick one from the teachers?

NO-----›GO TO PAGE 7, **QUESTION 17**----------

IF I CARE ONLY --›GO TO QUESTION 5 NEXT PAGE----------›

IF SCHOOL ONLY--›GO TO Q. 4 ---------›

YES --› Do you happen to know the names of one or both of the newsletters?

(WRITE IN NAMES IF GIVEN)

___YES--›_____

_____

___YES (SAY THEY KNOW, BUT NO NAMES GIVEN)

___NO

☐

4. What do you think of the short one-page SCHOOL NEWSLETTER that comes from the principal's office? Would you say it is...

EXCELLENT?____ VERY GOOD?____ JUST OK?____ NOT GOOD AT ALL?____ ☐

4A. Would you say the school newsletter easy to read?

YES ___ SOMEWHAT ___ NO ___ ☐

4B. Does it give you information that <u>you</u> need?

YES ___ SOMEWHAT ___ NO ___ ☐

--›IF SCHOOL NEWSLETTER ONLY, GO TO **QUESTION 17**, PAGE 7 ----------›

QUESTION 5 Now the rest of my questions will be about the I CARE NEWSLETTER

Did your child bring home any of the Bernard Harris I CARE PARENT Newsletters in the last 6 months?

PROBE: Let me check we're talking about the stapled booklet with the cover printed on colored paper?

(CIRCLE ONE) NO=========>[USE PROBE]
NOT SURE===>[USE PROBE]
IF DID NOT RECEIVE I CARE==>GO TO **QUESTION 17**, PAGE 7--------> ☐

YES ==> CONTINUE

6. About How Many of the I CARE Newsletters did you receive?

0 1 2 3 4 5+ ☐

PROBE: Do you mean 1 or 2 or 3 I CARE Newsletters or the other one?

7. Of the I CARE Newsletters your child brought home, Would you say you've read...

ALL ___ MOST ___ AT LEAST ONE ___ or NONE ☐

8. How often have you read something aloud to your child in the I Care Newsletter?

ALWAYS ___ MOST TIMES___ ONCE IN A WHILE___ NEVER ☐

9. How often has your child read something aloud to you from the I Care Newsletter?

ALWAYS ___ MOST TIMES___ ONCE IN A WHILE___ NEVER ☐

10. Does anyone else in your household read the I Care Newsletter ?

YES___ NO___ ☐

If YES Who would that be? [illegible]

11. Has your child's name, class, teacher's name, or your child's grade level ever appeared in the I Care Newsletter? (USE PROBES.)

_____YES (WRITE IN IF GIVEN)_____

_____YES

_____NO

_____DON'T KNOW

Now I would like to ask you your opinions about the Newsletter.

12. What do you think of the newsletter?
Would you say the Newsletter is...

EXCELLENT?___ PRETTY ENJOYABLE? _____ JUST OK?____ BORING? ___ A WASTE OF TIME?_____

13. What kinds of information or features did you like most? (Anything else?)

_____

_____

14. Would you say the Newsletter is...
(PROBES, ONLY IF RESPONDENT DOESN'T UNDERSTAND)

TOO LONG (meaning it has too many articles to read and too many pages)
TOO SHORT (meaning it has too few articles and too few pages)
or JUST RIGHT (or it has just the right number of articles and pages)?

(CHECK ANSWER) TOO LONG? ____ TOO SHORT? ____ JUST RIGHT? ____

15. Would you say the words in the I Care Newsletter are
EASY TO READ, HARD TO READ, or IN BETWEEN.

EASY TO READ _____ SOMETIMES EASY SOMETIMES HARD _____ HARD TO READ _____ (meaning words are to difficult)

QUESTION 17

16. **How would you improve the I Care Newsletter? Do you have any suggestions? Or Would you Add or Change anything?**
(Anything else?)

_____

_____

_____

(CONTINUE)

QUESTION 17

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about Bernard Harris.

Does the school help you know what is going on <u>there</u>?
Would you say the school gives you...

A LOT? ___ of infromation | SOME ___ information? | A LITTLE ___ information? | NOT MUCH ___ information at all? ☐

18. **Does the school help you know what <u>your child</u> is learning and what is happening in <u>your child's classes</u>?**
Would you say the school tells you...

A LOT?___ SOME THINGS? ___ A LITTLE?___ NOT MUCH AT ALL?___ ☐

19. How <u>do</u> you learn what is happening at school?

[PROMPTS: Like dittos, or notes, or phone calls? Anything else?]

.....

.....

.....

20. **Please tell, by answering YES, or NO, Has the school given you any information about any of the following school programs...**

[INTERVIEWER: PROMPT AS NECESSARY]

Has the school given you information about

The I CARE Parent Club? YES or NO — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: Did you know the I Care Parent Club meets every Tuesday?]

The Reading Clubs? YES or NO — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: The Principal's Reading Club? OR the Read with me Club?]

The City-County Connection? YES or NO — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: The program with Francis Scott Key High School in Carroll County?]

Writing to Read? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: The computer-based program?]

The Apple Computer Drive? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: Getting computer equipment from Giant grocery stores?]

That there are rewards for perfect attendance? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: Like the "Slide On To School" ice cream party?]

The Honor Roll? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: Students with high marks get special recognition?]

Volunteers at school? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: Parents at school]

The Dial-A-Teacher Program? — YES NO ☐

[PROMPT: There's a phone number you and your child can call for help with homework (It's 466-1545 IF THEY ASK YOU FOR IT)]

I CARE RECIPIENTS ===>GO TO Question 21 NEXT PAGE ====>

FOR NON-RECIPIENTS ONLY

20 A

FOR NON-RECIPIENTS ONLY ASK:

I understand you have not seen the I CARE Newsletter, but let me ask you this:

What do you think a good newsletter should include?

[PROBES: What kinds of information or features would you want to see in a school newsletter? PROMPT: Anything else?]

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(GO TO NEXT PAGE=====>)

QUESTION 21.
Now I am going to ask you a different type of question.
I'm going to read you a list of school subjects.
Please tell me YES or NO whether you want more information about the subject in order to help your child at home.

For each subject, just tell me YES, or NO,
Do you want more information about...

	(CHECK ANSWER IN BOX)		Coder
Arithmetic	YES	NO	
Social Studies	YES	NO	
Reading	YES	NO	
Science	YES	NO	
Spelling	YES	NO	
Handwriting	YES	NO	
Language Arts	YES	NO	
Testing Skills	YES	NO	

22. Are there any other subjects that I haven't mentioned that you'd like more information about? PROMPT: What subjects might they be?

_____

_____ ☐

23. Is there anything else you want to know about Bernard Harris this year? PROMPT: Anything else?

_____

_____ ☐

WE'RE JUST ABOUT FINISHED.

24. Finally, I would like to ask you just a few questions about yourself so that we can group your ideas with the ideas of other families like yours.

How is your child doing in school this year? Would you say your child is...

[IF MORE THAN 1 CHILD, FOR OLDEST CHILD AT BERNARD HARRIS]

[INTERVIEWER: CHECK RESPONSE.]

A TOP STUDENT? _____
A GOOD STUDENT? _____
AN AVERAGE STUDENT? _____
A FAIR STUDENT? _____
A POOR STUDENT? _____

☐

25. How does your child like school this year?
Would you say your child likes school...

A LOT ____ SOME ____ A LITTLE ___ NOT AT ALL ___

☐

26. What is the highest grade level you completed in school?

(WAIT FOR & CIRCLE RESPONSE)

6 7 8 9 10 11 12 some college completed college Other_____ (WRITE IN)

(PROBE ONLY AS NECESSARY: Did you complete 8th grade?
Did you complete high school?
Did you go beyond high school?
Did you get any training beyond high school?
Did you complete college?)

☐

27. Do you work outside the home -- Full-time or Part-time?

FULL-TIME_____ PART-TIME ____ DOES NOT WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME ____

☐

99 99 99 END OF INTERVIEW:

I'd like to thank you very much for your time and ideas. The school will send you a summary of the results from all the families in a newsletter later in the year (probably in September).

Do you have any other questions you want to ask me right now?

NO====> Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me. Good bye.

YES===> [INTERVIEWER: YOU MAY ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY.
CONSULT "QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SURVEY (WHAT THE FAMILY MIGHT ASK")

_____

_____

☐

Or

IF QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SCHOOL===> I do not have information to answer your questions about the school, but I will put your questions in the survey for the school to consider.

_____

_____

☐

Is there anything else?

_____

_____

☐

Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me. Good bye.

APPENDIX D -- Dr. Bernard Harris, Sr. Elementary School
TELEPHONE SURVEY RESULTS
(Based on a sample of 70 families)

Date of Interview

5/8-5/9	5/10-11	5/12	5/14	5/15-17	5/18-5/23
18.6%	25.7%	10%	18.6%	10%	17.2%

Interviewer: **#1** 58.6% **#2** 18.6% **#3** 20% **#4** 1.4% **#5** 1.4%

Length of Interview

6-11 Min.	12-14 Min.	15 Min.	16-20 Min.	22-28 Min.
29%	21.7%%	31.9%	11.4%	5.7%

Number of Calls to obtain each interview **1** 44.3% **2** 22.9% **3** 15.7% **4-9** 17.1%

Are you the parent or guardian?
What is your relation to the child(ren) who go(es) to BERNARD HARRIS?

MOTHER 77.1% **GRANDMOTHER** 10% **FATHER** 7.1% **AUNT** 4.3% **UNCLE** 1.4%

1. How many of your children attend Bernard Harris this year?

One 57.1% **Two** 28.6% **Three** 11.4% **Four** 2.9%

2. What grades are they in at Bernard Harris right now?

2A. Is this a boy or a girl?

Grade		Boys		Girls		Highest Grade of a Child
Pre-K	7.1%	62.5%	(5)	37.5%	(3)	8.6%
Kindergarten	21.4%	50%	(12)	50%	(12)	11.4%
First	19.6%	54.5%	(12)	45.5%	(10)	14.3%
Second	14.3%	50%	(8)	50%	(8)	15.7%
Third	14.3%	62.5%	(10)	37.5%	(6)	17.1%
Fourth	13.4%	33.3%	(5)	66.6%	(10)	17.1%
Fifth	8.9%	50%	(5)	50%	(5)	14.3%
Special	1%	100%	(1)			
N =	(112)		(58)		(54)	(70)

Boys=51.4%
Girls=48.6%

3. Now I'd like to ask you some questions about Bernard Harris. Are you aware that Bernard Harris puts out two newsletters?

Unaware of EITHER	SCHOOL ONLY	I CARE ONLY	Aware of BOTH
7.1%	8.6%	32.9%	51.4%

4. What do you think of the short one-page SCHOOL NEWSLETTER that comes from the principal's office? Would you say it is... (n=41)

EXCELLENT? 9.8% **VERY GOOD?** 58.5% **JUST OK?** 31.7%

4A. Would you say the school newsletter easy is to read? (n=42)

YES 57.1% **SOMEWHAT** 4.8% **NO** 0%

4B. Does it give you information that <u>you</u> need? (n=42)

YES 78.6% **SOMEWHAT** 19.0% **NO** 2.4%

[Question 5 is omitted.]

6. About how many of the I Care Parent Newsletters did you receive?

0	1	2	3	4	5 or more
17.1%	8.6%	27.1%	18.6%	17.1%	11.4%

7. Of the I CARE Parent Newsletters your child brought home, would you say you've read... (n=59)

ALL 40.7% **MOST** 30.5% **AT LEAST ONE** 27.1% **NONE** 1.7%

8. How often have you read something aloud to your child in the I Care Parent Newsletter? (n=59)

ALWAYS 18.6% **MOST TIMES** 25.4% **ONCE IN A WHILE** 40.7% **NEVER** 15.3%

9. How often has your child read something aloud to you from the I Care Parent Newsletter? (n=59)

ALWAYS 23.7% **MOST TIMES** 11.9% **ONCE IN A WHILE** 28.8% **NEVER** 35.6%

10. Does anyone else in your household read the I Care Parent Newsletter ? (n=57)

YES 52.6% **NO** 47.4%

Mother* 10.5% **Father** 8.8% **Grandmother** 12.3% **Aunt** 7%

Sibling(s) 31.6% **Uncle** 3.5% **Other** 5.3%

*if not interviewed

11. Has your child's name, class, teacher's name, or your child's grade level ever appeared in the I Care Parent Newsletter?

YES 67.8% **NO** 30.5% **DON'T KNOW** 2%

Child's Name	Child's Class	Teacher's Name	Child's Grade	Other
32.8%	22.4%	46.6%	27.6%	3.4%

12. What do you think of the Newsletter? Would you say the Newsletter is...(n=59)

EXCELLENT? 22% **PRETTY ENJOYABLE?** 49.2% **JUST OK?** 27.1% **BORING?** 1.7% **A WASTE OF TIME?** 0%

13. What kinds of information or features did you like most? (Anything else?)

Number of Features:

None specified:	11.9%	**Events:**	52.5%
One:	33.9%	**Students' Achievement:**	44.1%
Two:	18.6%	**Children's Writing:**	16.9%
Three:	18.6%	**Curriculum:**	13.6%
Four:	11.9%	**Recipes:**	10.2%
Five:	5.1%	**Other Features:**	37.3%
		General:	22.0%

14. Would you say the Newsletter is... (n=57)

TOO LONG? 17.5% **TOO SHORT?** 5.3% **JUST RIGHT?** 77.2%

15. Would you say the <u>words</u> in the I Care Parent Newsletter are (n=59)

EASY TO READ 89.8% **SOMETIMES EASY SOMETIMES HARD** 8.5% **HARD TO READ** 1.7%

16. **How would you improve the I Care Parent Newsletter? Do you have any suggestions? Or would you add or change anything?**

Making Suggestions N= 29

"As is":	31.0%	**Event Descriptions:**	20.7%
Students' Progress:	17.2%	**Calendar:**	10.3%
Students' Input:	17.2%	**Appearance:**	37.9%
Delivery:	13.8%	**Other:**	27.6%

17. **Does the school help you know what is going on <u>there</u>? (N=70)**

Would you say the school gives you...

A LOT of information?	54.3%	**SOME information?**	31.4%	**A LITTLE information?**	5.7%	**NOT MUCH information at all?**	8.6%

18. **Does the school help you know what <u>your child</u> is learning and what is happening in <u>your child's classes</u>? Would you say the school tells you...**

A LOT?	45.7%	**SOME THINGS?**	27.1%	**A LITTLE?**	7.1%	**NOT MUCH AT ALL?**	20.0%

19. **How do <u>you</u> learn what is happening at school?**
Number of ways parent learns about school: (n=69)

One: 10.1%	**Two:** 33.3%	**Three:** 43.5%	**Four:** 11.6%	**Five:** 1.4%	
Dittos	**Notes**	**Phone calls**	**Visits**	**Child tells**	**Other**
59.4%	58%	20.3%	60.9%	44.9%	14.5%

20. **Please tell, by answering YES, or NO: Has the school given you any information about any of the following school programs... (N=70)**

Rewards to Students for perfect attendance?	**YES**	94.3%	**NO**	5.7%
Volunteers at school?	**YES**	90.0%	**NO**	10.0%
The Apple Computer Drive?	**YES**	82.9%	**NO**	17.1%
The I CARE Parent Club?	**YES**	78.3%	**NO**	21.7%
Writing to Read?	**YES**	75.7%	**NO**	24.3%
The Honor Roll?	**YES**	74.3%	**NO**	25.7%
The Dial-A-Teacher Program?	**YES**	72.9%	**NO**	27.1%
The Reading Clubs?	**YES**	65.2%	**NO**	34.8%
The City-County Connection?	**YES**	14.3%	**NO**	85.7%

20A. [FOR NON-RECIPIENTS ONLY]

I understand you have not seen the I Care Parent Newsletter, but let me ask you this: What do you think a good newsletter <u>should</u> include? (N=11)

Number of suggestions:

None 18.2% **One:** 27.3% **Two:** 9.1% **Four:** 18.2% **Five:** 18.2% **Eight:** 9.1%

Content of Suggestions:

Events:	80%	**Appearance:**	10%
Calendar:	30%	**Student Progress:**	30%
Delivery:	20%	**Other:**	50%

NOTE: Questions 21-28 were answered by ALL and are based on N=70.

21. For each subject, just tell me YES, or NO. Do you want more information about...

Testing Skills	**YES**	84.3	**NO**	15.7%
Reading	**YES**	82.9%	**NO**	17.1%
Arithmetic	**YES**	80.0%	**NO**	20.0%
Spelling	**YES**	80.0%	**NO**	20.0%
Science	**YES**	71.4%	**NO**	28.6%
Handwriting	**YES**	71.4%	**NO**	28.6%
Language Arts	**YES**	70.0%	**NO**	30.0%
Social Studies	**YES**	67.1%	**NO**	32.9%

22. Are there any other subjects that I haven't mentioned that you'd like more information about?

% Requesting More Information:	30.0%		
Art:	5.7%	**Black History:**	7.1%
Music:	2.9%	**Foreign Language:**	4.3%
Computer:	5.7%	**Other:**	15.7%

23. Is there anything else you want to know about Bernard Harris this year?

% Making Requests:	41.4%	**About Teachers:**	4.3%
Good School:	11.4%	**School Policy:**	15.7%
Summer Programs:	5.7%	**Curriculum:**	7.1%
Security:	4.3%	**Parent Involvement:**	7.1%
Extra-Curricular:	2.9%	**Other Concerns:**	12.9%

24. How is your child doing in school this year? Would you say your child is...
[If more than 1 child, for child IN HIGHEST GRADE at Bernard Harris.]

TOP 20.0% **GOOD** 34.3% **AVERAGE** 24.3% **FAIR** 18.6% **POOR** 2.9%

25. How does your child like school this year?
Would you say your child likes school...

A LOT 60.0% **SOME** 24.3% **A LITTLE** 15.7% **NOT AT ALL** 0%

26. What is the highest grade level <u>you</u> completed in school?

7th	9th	10th	11th	Completed High School	Some College	Graduate School
1.4%	10%	4.3%	12.9%	45.7%	24.3%	1.4%

. Probe: Did you get any training beyond high school?

No Other Training 50% **Military or Other Training** 50%

27. Do you work outside the home -- Full-time or Part-time?

FULL-TIME 50% **PART-TIME** 14.3% **DOES NOT WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME** 35.7%

>>> END OF INTERVIEW >>>

28. Do you have any other questions you want to ask me right now?

No Questions 91.4% **Some Questions** 8.6%